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IN SEARCH OF A CONCEPT**

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## THE YELTSIN ADMINISTRATION'S POLICY IN THE FAR EAST: IN SEARCH OF A CONCEPT

Alexei D. Bogaturov

The collapse of the Soviet Union has drastically changed the political design of Central and Eastern Eurasia. What for five decades was "Eastern" has reemerged as Central Europe; centuries-long "northward-looking" Ukraine, abruptly turned to the West, a move followed by Moldova. The Baltic states—a core piece and symbol of the Russian presence in Europe since the time of Peter the Great—have taken a strong anti-Russian stand and may be considered anything but Moscow's fortress on the Atlantic. Russia feels cut off from the West or, more precisely, the *European* West.

Furthermore, Russia is also removed from the south. There Moscow faces the thinly disguised mistrust of Azerbaijan and the obviously tense relations with Georgia. Armenia is the only post-Soviet nation in Transcaucasia that seeks Russian protection. But Armenia is Russia's burden rather than a reliable ally.

No matter how much Russia's Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev may personally adhere to "Atlantic" thinking (or "Euro-Atlantic" thinking), he cannot ignore two inescapable facts: not since the Middle Ages has Russia's political space been so far

removed from Atlantic Europe, nor have Russian national interests ever been so strongly tied to the challenging East.

### Concerns and Aspirations

Of course, Western challenges do exist. Ukraine's nuclear ambitions and the new apartheid in Estonia speak for themselves. Nonetheless, the basic challenge in terms of real threats as well as chances to appraise Russia's ability to cooperate with the United States and other democratic states lies in Asia. President Boris Yeltsin seems to understand instinctively this shift in the political reality, even though domestic tensions do not promise much practical change in his policy. Conceptual shifts, however, are more apparent.

During Mikhail Gorbachev's years (1986-1991), Soviet/Russian policy in the Pacific was framed by the concept of "compensating abilities."<sup>1</sup> According to this policy, reductions in military presence were deemed acceptable if balanced by an adequate increase in the Soviet economic and/or political

1 See Alexei Bogaturov, "The Soviet Asian-Pacific Doctrine: General Outlines," in *The World Confronts Perestroika: The Challenges to East Asia*, edited by Takayuki Ito (Sapporo: Hokkaido University Press, 1991), pp. 51-68.





posture so that an overall equilibrium of Moscow's presence remained intact. The Soviet-Chinese normalization in 1989 was perceived as a tool to balance military reductions in the Far East, Central Asia and Siberia.

The post-Soviet epoch has placed a newly independent Russia in a substantially new environment, one which took the leaders in Moscow some two years to understand properly. Not surprisingly, the initial period of Russia's policy (1991-92) exhibited a confusing mixture of enthusiastically proclaimed democratic innovation and a strong tendency toward "great-power" inertia. On the one hand, Russia commanded extremely limited resources to pursue an active program, but Kozyrev, on the other hand, did not abandon the baggage of perestroika. As a result, the "breakthrough to Japan" that had been envisaged in "long-ago Soviet years" turned out to be a heavy loss not only for the radical/democratic factions, but for all liberals in Russia. An unintended result of that shock, however, was the Kremlin's hastily performed reconsideration of its vision for both domestic and Northeast Asian realities.

Gorbachev, too, was restricted by the financial capabilities of the USSR in his dealings with the Far East. Success normally depended on his ability to concentrate the available resources on a chosen direction. The key was to make the right choice, which he did by setting one big and one moderate objective: (1) reconciliation with Beijing and (2) rapprochement with Seoul.

Yeltsin's goals are no less impressive, but his position is considerably more complicated. With almost no resources at hand and his very presidency challenged, Yeltsin finds himself in the position that the proper course would be to avoid unrealistic targets—were it not for his overwhelming desire to surpass Gorbachev's success. This is where the recurrent gap between word and deed in Moscow's foreign policy will stem from in the years to come.

In Yeltsin's speech to the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea (November 1992), which in his eyes has to be no less significant than Gorbachev's message delivered in Vladivostok (1986), we read: "Nowadays our policy *is being transferred* [*perenositsya*, my italics, A.B.] from the West Euro-

pean and American lines to the Asia-Pacific region and my visit here is the first move in this process."<sup>2</sup> A definite statement along these lines has never been uttered by a Russian or Soviet leader—at least in this century. Moscow, no doubt, now has a more adequate understanding of East Asia and its growing role. Three basic realities will shape the Russian administration's approach to the region: domestic economic survival, reduced defense potential, and the search for new partnerships.

Russia is unable to impose upon the United States limitations on its naval activity at the price of further ground force reductions in the Russian Far East. For domestic economic reasons and the military's pragmatic calculations, Moscow—at least for the near future—will follow the path of unilateral reductions, even if they are not balanced by Russia's improved economic position or reciprocal U.S. reductions, though this unilateralism will cause serious domestic problems for the President.

Moscow's new approach to the Pacific is actually based on a "reasonable compression" of Russian responsibilities and a slow retreat from the region. The new concept in foreign policy is concerned with managing the inevitable withdrawal from East Asia, in distinct contrast to the "compensating abilities" doctrine that aimed to prevent this retreat.

Realities and events in Russia as well as the region will force Yeltsin to focus more attention on the Russian Far East and East Asia than was traditionally the case. In addition to the issues of the Black Sea Fleet and Russo-Ukrainian "family squabbles," there are a host of concerns in the East that will present formidable challenges: possible economic isolation from what could become a Japan-China-Kazakhstan "business belt" that utilizes new railroads south of the Trans-Siberian line; the collapse of housing programs and the resulting decline of a Russian physical—demographic—presence in the Russo-Chinese frontier; unsettled political priorities in Mongolia; new anti-Russian sentiment in formerly friendly Vietnam; and, finally, the all but lost influence over North Korean policy and Pyongyang's nuclear program.

Broadly defined, Moscow faces four immediate regional challenges: (1) nuclear proliferation and uncertainties of future security relations between China and Kazakhstan, (2) nuclear pollution in the

2 *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, November 21, 1992. This was the only newspaper to publish the full transcript of Yeltsin's speech without comment. Practically all commentators avoid citing the specific lines on the "policy being transferred" in the President's statement, even though details of the visit were widely discussed in the Russian media.



event of destruction of North Korean nuclear facilities should there be a conventional conflict on the Korean peninsula, (3) national secessionism and irredentism in Russia (pro-Mongolian tendencies in the Buryat-inhabited regions of Baikal) and China (Sinkiang and Inner Mongolia), (4) economic underdevelopment and the discouraging demographic situation in the Russian Far East through a steady "economic penetration" by the Chinese, i.e., a gradually growing number of Chinese "entrepreneurs," traders, smugglers, and average people seeking Russian citizenship and permission to settle in Russia.

To address these challenges successfully, policy will obviously need to take into account Russia's long-range national aspirations and be consistent with its changed basic values and perceptions. In 1991 the nation made its choice, which was confirmed in April 1993 by the vote against reversing the course of development. Russian policy now is mainly driven by the desire to build a stable, wealthy nation on a foundation of the market, individual freedom and initiative, private property, political pluralism and liberal democracy. Above all, the country must maintain its national identity and preserve its territorial integrity—nothing more and nothing less. Economic revitalization in the Far East is the critical condition for the realization of both these goals. All this will incline Russia to be responsive to international influences to the extent that cooperation, rather than rivalry with the U.S. and its East Asian partners, will be viewed as serving Russian national interests.

Some might argue that a reverse development and the collapse of the present regime is not an impossible scenario for Russia. Indeed, that may be the case. But it appears to be equally evident that a full-scale retreat, say, to pre-Gorbachev days, is unimaginable. Not only the upper strata of Russian society have tasted freedom—both individual and economic. The greater part of the average citizenry prefers not to live under conditions of guaranteed poverty under the system of state distribution, which is not to say that all are willing to bear the burdens of the transition period.

The current debate in Moscow regarding its place in the international community is not merely a political one, but reflects the clash between two visions (radical and conservative) of the path for Russia's reintegration into the West. The hard fact is that a large portion of the anti-Yeltsin opposition (discounting orthodox Communists) do not, in principle, disagree with privatization. Conversely, the whole fuss between the Civic Union and the

government basically revolves around the right to control privatization and the immeasurable profits to be gained by the winners.

The pro-Western, liberal and reformist traditions in Russia are not exclusively represented by radical democrats, but are also embraced by considerable segments of those right-of-center and moderate national forces. Despite divergences, liberals inside and outside the presidential team largely share a common vision of the East Asian situation. Whether they are formally admitted into the government or not, liberals, with the exception of the radical democrats, will exercise the greater influence on Russia's foreign policy.

## The United States-Centered Framework

The absence of a global threat does not necessarily signify that Moscow has no cause for apprehension. Ironically, the unlikelihood of a U.S. nuclear attack has not lessened Russia's concern for national security. Soviet political thinking did not seriously consider regional threats. By contrast, the new Russian mentality is keenly aware of the challenges and uncertainties surrounding Russia's frontiers with Kazakhstan, Mongolia, China, North Korea and Japan. This sense of uncertainty is pushing Russia to search for reliable partners. Moreover, Russian foreign policy faces a painful dilemma: to act as a "normal" great power (i.e., to preserve maximum independence in security issues) or to reconcile itself to the role of de-facto junior American partner. The former is scarcely possible, while the latter implies an "associate membership" in the U.S.-centered regional security system, an option for which neither Moscow nor Washington is prepared.

A "self-sufficiency" approach seems to be inconsistent with Moscow's intentions. In the fall of 1992, President Yeltsin announced new reductions in the Pacific fleet, withdrawals of tactical weapons from all battleships and submarines, and a decrease (by fifty percent) in the number of new submarines to be deployed in the Pacific. He also stated that within two to three years Russia would stop building new submarines designed "for military use."<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, the new Russian defense establishment does not appear to be enthusiastic about the reductions, largely, however, for the social repercussions.

The post-Soviet Russian military is better educated and more flexible than its predecessors. The Ministry of Defense has recruited a number of civil-



ian intellectuals, including a well-known former academician, Andrey Kokoshin, who was appointed deputy minister, an unusual move from the point of view of the traditional Soviet approach to security policy-making. Nonetheless, military officials refer to their uncertainty about U.S. intentions in the long run and America's unwillingness to negotiate strategic points in the Pacific. Hesitation in the defense establishment is echoed by academic experts who either support the idea of self-sufficiency or favor a reliance on cooperation with the U.S. Among the first group, Andronik Migranyan, who in 1992 became one of the President's official advisers, should be mentioned. Sergey Blagovolin, director of the independent Institute for Strategic Studies and National Defense (Moscow) emotionally defends a "cooperative" approach. In contrast to the impassioned discussions in Russia, the American military, it seems, for budget reasons and "wealthy" skepticism would like to see Moscow's foreign policy in the near future develop along a moderately conservative line. Like some of their Russian counterparts, the Americans would prefer to deal with Russia as a non-hostile state, but not an allied one. Following this line of reasoning, they do not find it necessary to consider Russia's security role in the Pacific in any other terms than reducing their former rival's ability to project strategic might, while Moscow seeks to obtain a "positive security function" in the Pacific, along with making its potential smaller and decision-making more responsive to U.S. influence. Washington, however, appears satisfied with Russia's diminished role and has nothing against seeing it reduced even more.

The Russo-U.S. confrontation is over, but prudence remains a valid trait. Russian reductions for reduction's sake in the Asian Pacific region raise serious concerns. After all, to run away from the region cannot be in Russia's national interests. The nation requires strength to maintain its territorial integrity and economic interests, no matter how limited they *now* are. As for the strategic component of the Russian presence in the Pacific, largely circumscribed by the Sea of Okhotsk and the equator near the Russian off-shore line, it is crucial to maintain global equilibrium as well as subregional stability in the North Pacific. It can be opened up in the interests of international cooperation—for the United States in particular, but it should not be downgraded to a negligible level.

The U.S. military presence in the Asian Pacific region and its strategic alliances with Japan and South Korea play an unquestionably important stabilizing role in the Pacific. But this role can be further enhanced if combined with a Russo-U.S. strategic understanding vis-à-vis the Pacific. Washington is reluctant to restrict its naval operations, but even this state of affairs is not a persuasive justification for *no* Russo-U.S. strategic engagement.

Reductions—on the part of the Russians or the Americans, or both—do not completely solve the issue at hand. Reductions undoubtedly promote trust and cooperation, but they can produce a vacuum that may lead to a deterioration of stability if unbalanced by a stronger strategic collaboration between Moscow and Washington. A partnership with the United States is the only means to obtain a supporting political framework to enhance Russian interests in East Asia.

## The China Question

For many years Moscow's experts began their analyses of Northeast Asia with China. Nowadays, the traditional approach does not suffice, since China's foreign policy cannot be properly understood outside the context of Beijing's relations with para-nuclear Kazakhstan—a newly emerged Asian player. Expanded territory, a large population, rich natural resources, a comparatively educated labor force, and a considerable industrial sector coupled with agricultural self-sufficiency all contribute to make Kazakhstan a potentially strong player in North Asia. Kazakhstan may choose to play the role of pillar of regional stability or turn out to be a permanent headache for its neighbors—China to the east and Russia to the west. A large population of Kazakh and other Turkic minorities in the Chinese province of Sinkiang closely tie Kazakhstan to developments within China, a situation to which Russia is particularly sensitive. The Turkic minorities pose a potentially troubling issue for China-Kazakhstan relations. Separatism and irredentism of the Chinese Uigur, Kazakh and Kirghiz in Sinkiang-Uigur autonomous region of the People's Republic of China have never been extinguished. The rise of nationalism in the formerly Soviet geo-



political sphere has strongly influenced the Chinese Turks.

Kazakhstan is unlikely to play a nationalist card against China, particularly considering President Nazarbayev's own domestic problems with nationalists and the multinational composition of Kazakhstan society. The danger, however, may emanate from China if the Kazakh and other non-Chinese minorities in Sinkiang prove to be less reasonable and self-restrained than their kinsmen outside China. The problem for Russia would hinge on how to avoid involvement in a possible China-Kazakhstan dispute. Instability in Kazakhstan would almost automatically hurt Moscow's stake regarding the Russian nuclear presence on Kazakhstan's territory.

Kazakhstan formally became Russia's ally with the signing in 1992 of the Russo-Kazakhstan Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation. Kazakhstan is Russia's principal ally in Asia, much in the way that Japan is for the United States. Moscow confirmed its responsibility for Kazakhstan's national security by providing it with a nuclear umbrella, to a great extent the same pattern found in U.S.-Japan relations. Stable relations between Kazakhstan and China are crucial to denuclearize the former. Strains between Alma-Ata and Beijing could slow down an ultimate accord on nuclear weapons in Kazakhstan, while preventing nuclear proliferation in Asia is in the interests of China as well as Russia and the United States. In addition, Russia and China both wish to control the nationalist tendencies in the region. Indeed, Moscow will continue its reserved stand on the Tibet question and developments in Sinkiang and Inner Mongolia, where China faces nationalistic opposition. Conversely, the rise of pro-Mongolian irredentism in Tuva and the Buryat-inhabited areas of the Baikal region of the Russian Federation would not elicit a sympathetic response from Beijing, since the rise of nationalism among the Mongolian peoples would be echoed in China.

Apart from the above-mentioned mutual concerns, Russia and China share other less obvious interests. Russia favors unofficial economic relations with Taiwan, whose prosperity off the mainland remains an integral component of the regional design. Different business groups in Russia are competing for commercial ties with Taipei, a competition that involves some highly-placed Moscow officials. Although there are no indications at present that the Russian Federation is considering diplomatic recognition of Taiwan, one should expect broadening economic cooperation. Beijing is acutely sensitive to everything that could possibly

imply relations between its arch rival and the world at large. While one may understand this sensitivity, it is less reasonable to threaten Taipei with the chimera of employing force. The reunification of China and Taiwan is scarcely likely to occur along the Korean or German patterns. The Vietnamese model also appears to be an unlikely alternative. Now that the People's Republic of China enjoys international recognition as a great power it could declare the "non-use of force" as the principal approach to reunification in order to remove regional suspicions as to its policy.

Russia, of course, is monitoring China's new assertiveness in Asia. The political struggle in Beijing seems to be far from over and new tides of domestic instability remain a distinct probability. The People's Republic of China's foreign policy, however, remains no more predictable than the impulsive personnel changes within the top echelons of the Communist Party of China. Meanwhile, Beijing's regional ambitions and increased defense spending remain relatively stable. China's activism is directed toward South China Sea oil fields, which does not give Russia sufficient grounds to consider China an immediate threat to its national security. Moreover, the semi-isolation from off-shore Pacific areas of the Asian Pacific region pushes Russia to turn to its geographically close continental neighbor.

In December 1992, Yeltsin traveled to Beijing to sign the Joint Declaration on Russo-Chinese Relations. Both nations proclaimed peaceful coexistence to be the basis for future relations. Russia and China have also agreed not to participate in any alliance unfriendly to either party. The 25-year-long dispute on "regional hegemony" seems to be over and Moscow now longer views the 1978 China-Japan treaty on peace and friendship to be a threat. Rapprochement with China has its economic dimension as well. Yeltsin confirmed his intention to continue arms sales to China. In addition, he gave the green light to resuming cooperation with Beijing in the peaceful use of atomic energy, which had languished in stalemate since the denunciation of the previous analogous agreement by Moscow in 1959. Russia will provide equipment and technical assistance for the construction of a nuclear power plant in China. In return, Russia will receive consumer goods (machinery and food) from China.<sup>4</sup> Russia, consequently, will become more dependent on economic ties with China. In turn, economic dependence will feed pro-Chinese and anti-Western sentiments in the Russian establishment.



Meanwhile, China's military role in the future remains difficult to assess accurately. One must take into account such factors as Japan's future military potential, the degree of confidence shown by the two Korean states, Sino-American relations, U.S. policy towards Russia, and, finally, reconciliation between China and Taiwan. At any rate, Russia cannot afford to be indifferent to the long-range implications of China's reemergence as a strong military power, whose influence within and outside the region may exceed the balancing capabilities of any neighboring state.

## The Korean Peninsula

Theoretically, Russia can enter the U.S.-based security system in the APR via two paths: direct negotiation with Washington or indirect engagement by means of close cooperation with one or several U.S. partners. Russia embarked upon the second path. A new relationship with the Republic of Korea, as embodied in the Russo-Korean Treaty on Principles of Relations, the most important statement of Moscow's regional diplomacy since the 1950 Soviet-Sino Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance. The basic difference, however, is that the alliance with the People's Republic of China marked a division of East Asia and the rising anti-Americanism of Stalin's policy, whereas the newly signed treaty with the Republic of Korea symbolizes common ground and future regional reconciliation. Yeltsin is continuing the process initiated by Gorbachev and Ro Tae Woo in the late 1980s and achieved a full-scale treaty in which Russia, for the first time, proclaimed "common ideals of freedom, democracy, respect for human rights and a market economy" as the foundation for relations with a Pacific nation.<sup>4</sup> The Russian-South Korean partnership is a long-awaited tool necessary to place Korean reunification into a more stable and favorable international context. The treaty, signed in November 1992, will act as an effective political balance to the Soviet-North Korean treaty of 1961, which is subject to renegotiation and alteration as stipulated in its provisions. At the same time, Moscow should be mindful not to cause any unnecessary and potentially dangerous estrangement with Pyongyang. Old Communist stereotypes should not give way to new misunderstandings. South

Korea's willingness to cooperate with Russia arises primarily from political origins. Above all, Seoul seeks Russia's positive influence over the North for the reunification cause. Economic interaction and trade are essential, but decidedly of secondary importance.

Yeltsin stated that he intended to cut *all* defense assistance to North Korea as well as *all* arms sales. But defense assistance was actually the main card in Moscow's hand to pressure the North Korean regime. How can Russia influence Pyongyang, say, to persuade it to reestimate North Korean withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) now that Russo-North Korean relations have been spoiled by what was said and done in Moscow? Yeltsin's diplomacy on this particular issue formally corresponds with the "reasonable compression" concept by which Russia continues to reduce its fields of direct international responsibility. Yet at the same time, Russia is shouldering its share of responsibility on China, the United States, and South Korea. Is this what was planned? After all, Russia is too vulnerable to the situation in Korea, given the nuclear power facilities in the North as well as in the South, to reconcile itself to a "wait and see" approach.

North Korea has already been shoved into a corner—at least that is how it feels. Naturally, North Korea wants some guarantee of its survival as a political entity until the inter-Korea dialogue succeeds and an acceptable draft for reunification is reached. The South has security guarantees from the United States and friendly relations with Russia, a stable relationship with Japan, and, finally, improving ties with China. By contrast, the North has commitments from China, a morally devalued pledge from the non-existent Soviet Union and tense relations with Washington and Tokyo, not to mention new hostilities between Pyongyang and Seoul.

North Korea's decision to withdraw from the NPT was inadequate, but before that North Korea demonstrated a good degree of prudence. The fall of 1991 was marked by important inter-Korean agreements. In January 1992, six years after joining the NPT, Pyongyang signed a safeguard agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Having ratified the agreement, the North accepted six international inspections. One can ar-

4 *Izvestiya*, December 18, 1992.

5 *Izvestiya*, November 19, 1992.



gue that North Korea's prudence was directed by powerful *external* pressures, which is true, but not the whole truth. Kim Il Sung's regime is a repressive dictatorship, but it is not immune to internal pressures. In fact, a "revisionist" opposition does exist within North Korea, but it is hardly composed of democrats or liberals in our sense, rather it is characterized by younger people who wish to find new answers to old questions. Kim's cautious zigzag steps may reflect these invisible ripples. These people need encouraging "positive" signals from the outside world to argue in favor of reconciliation. Internal pressures alone, though necessary, cannot guarantee positive results. The "Team Spirit Affair" and the turmoil surrounding the North's withdrawal from the Non-Proliferation Treaty illustrated how counterproductive sanctions can be if unaccompanied by mitigating efforts. Reasoned firmness should be accompanied by a determination to explore all possible means of reasonable accommodation.

We cannot escape dealing with North Korea, no matter how "bad" it appears to be. The North Korean regime's vulnerability and fragility make survival in the long run doubtful, given the impact of the hidden domestic erosions, but it is sufficiently powerful to explode the increasingly delicate stability of the Korean peninsula. There is little doubt that Pyongyang has its own nuclear program and is working hard at its realization. But even nuclear pollution from North Korean nuclear plants, in the case of attack, is not an acceptable price for possible misinterpretations by the North of U.S. or South Korean intentions. One cannot help but favor the ultimate collapse of the Communist regime in Pyongyang. But this should be a political collapse resulting from domestic developments and a power struggle following Kim's removal from the scene. Prior to that event, international pressure should be combined with flexibility. The U.S. might consider the possibility of accepting the "no first use" position in conjunction with similar pledges by the other powers.

As for Russia, now that the treaty with South Korea has been signed, it is time to reconsider the chances for coming to an understanding with Pyongyang. Russian diplomacy will require great patience, delicacy and imagination in order to persuade North Korea that reconciliation with the outside world is essential for its own survival. Naturally, North Korea will expect guarantees, which should be granted. But they should be political guarantees, not military ones. Not only should Moscow sign a new treaty with North Korea, one

that would exclude the notorious Article 1, but the United States should consider declaring its unwillingness to destroy the regime in Pyongyang by use of force, providing the North does not first use force. The problem is that Russia has actually disarmed itself in the eyes of the North. Russia has voluntarily abandoned practically all the tools it held to influence Pyongyang. Instead of being on better terms with South Korea and maintaining satisfactory relations with North Korea, Moscow has admitted that its relations with Pyongyang have deteriorated to a level insufficient to manage its policies. The delicate balance of influence in Korea was violated. China took the opportunity to be the principal (if not sole) possible mediator between North Korea and the outside world.

## Cold-Warm Interaction

Despite the neverending speculations about Japan in the Russian press, Tokyo does not enjoy a high-ranking place in Moscow's priorities. This abnormal situation is becoming increasingly intolerable in light of Japan's influence in world politics and its enormous economic might. Nonetheless, Russo-Japanese relations remain a function of Russo-U.S. relations as they were two or five decades ago.

The end of the old-style global confrontation has altered and challenged the international environment of the Japan-U.S. alliance. It is difficult to say whether Tokyo would be apt to reconsider its partnership with the U.S., but it is clear that Japan is less satisfied with the partnership than has ever been the case since 1951. Economic frictions accumulated over several decades, together with the "devalued" perception of the strategic importance of the U.S.-Japan alliance have created a new negativism in the United States toward Japan. It has become difficult to explain to Congress and the media the importance of the U.S.-Japan "special" relationship in the absence of a Russian threat. It is even more difficult to persuade the American public that the "unilateral gains" Japan presumably extracts from economic relations with the United States are not what they are thought to be and in fact serve U.S. interests. The deterioration of the U.S.-Japan alliance is not in the interests of Russia, since a stable relationship in the strategic realm meets Russia's national interests. Militarily independent Japan would not contribute to regional security, regardless whether it decides to go nuclear. Russia, therefore, prefers to see Tokyo well integrated into the U.S.-based secu-



rity system, since improved Russo-American relations indirectly stabilize the troubled ones between Tokyo and Moscow.

The territorial problem is the splinter in Russo-Japanese relations. The cancellation of Yeltsin's visit to Tokyo, two weeks prior to his scheduled departure, proved a heavy blow not only for prospects of Russo-Japanese rapprochement, but also for those "enthusiasts" within the Russian Foreign Ministry who were in control of Russia's eastern policy after George Kunaze, a former academic and expert on Japan, was appointed deputy minister in the fall of 1990. The defeat of the "enthusiasts" was also noteworthy for the fact that it actually became the first volley of an open war between the Diet and the President on foreign policy. In any case, the enthusiasts lost their chance. The resistance they unintentionally provoked from the deputy corps led to the involvement of a large number of previously indifferent people who were largely ignorant of the substance of the dispute but more than willing to say their "patriotic" word. This simultaneously accelerated the formation of a powerful regional lobby that is concerned by the economic importance of the disputed islands for the local economy and the terrible losses regional budgets would suffer should the territories be transferred to Japan. Ironically, the military appears less anxious by this issue than the local administrations, though it should be pointed out that the Ground Force Command seems to be more flexible than the Russian Navy.

No one in Russia seriously envisages an attack on the disputed Kuril Islands by "Japanese militarists." The Russian public, however, does interpret Japan's firm stand on the territorial issue to be symbolic of the humiliated position Russia finds itself in after independence. After years of indifference to the government's policy toward Japan the people now find the present moment of national crisis an improper time for a "decent" settlement, that is, a settlement that would allow Russia to save face.

What are the implications for the future? A breakthrough in settling the territorial issue is improbable without personnel changes in the Russian Foreign Ministry. That, however, depends on whether Yeltsin modifies his approach to the idea of broadening the political foundation of his regime. A coalition with moderate "statists" (Civic

Union) might be a tool for Yeltsin to consolidate Russian society. The core of Yeltsin's team is rather prickly when it comes to sharing power, but their "jealousies" relate primarily to the economic sphere. Foreign policy, although an essential component, seems to be of lesser importance for the majority of the "President's men." If Yeltsin were to replace Foreign Minister Kozyrev with a more pragmatic person with a reputation for being "nationally-minded," the replacement would have a much greater immunity against criticism from all sides for the neglect of national interests. This would allow a different approach to the territorial question.

Yuly Vorontsov, a career diplomat, and Vladimir Lukin, Russia's ambassador to Washington, are often mentioned as possible replacements for Kozyrev. Lukin has a reputation for being a reasonable pro-Western pragmatist and an emotional critic of Russia's unconditional surrender in international politics. He takes the view that concessions to the West are necessary, but that Russia should take a stronger stand when bargaining on certain issues, including the territorial dispute with Japan. As an expert on Asia and the Pacific region (he spent 15 years in the Department of Pacific Studies of the Institute of the USA and Canada before embarking on his political career), Lukin is one of the few people in the liberal-democratic segment of the establishment with a background in Asian affairs. His answer to the Japanese dilemma would differ from that of the Kozyrev-Kunaze team. But it wouldn't necessarily be a negative stand. With the exception of some orthodox Communists and extreme nationalists, most Russians do not disagree in principle with the Joint Soviet-Japanese Declaration of 1956 that stipulated a gradual territorial settlement and the conclusion of a Russian-Japanese peace treaty.

In addition, a stronger assent on a subregional security accord on the Sea of Japan and areas approximate to the disputed islands is to be expected. As one expert on Russian military affairs writes: "There is no sense in transferring the islands to Japan even if their strategic importance would be taken to be a limited one. This should be done only as an integral element of a radical restructuring of strategic relations in the region so that the United States and Japan would no longer be perceived as Russia's hypothetical adversaries in Asia."<sup>6</sup>

6 For further information, see B. Makeyev's article on the military aspects of the Kurile issue in *Mirovaya ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya*



One should try to understand the Russian supporters of territorial settlement. Both the enthusiasts and pragmatists will need persuasive justification for any concession offered to Japan (or what will be perceived as such by the Russian public). An accord on subregional security affairs would help considerably. Although it is unlikely that direct U.S. involvement in the Russo-Japanese discourse will prove to be an attractive option for Washington, American participation is an inseparable, if not decisive, element of Russo-Japanese negotiations on bilateral security affairs.

## A Former Satellite

Underestimation is the word to describe Russian policy toward Mongolia, formerly a close ally of the USSR. Meanwhile, a Russo-Mongolian understanding is essential for the sake of domestic stability in the Russian Far East.

Secession is proving to be a critical challenge for Moscow. Large areas of the Russian Federation are inhabited by Buryat and Tuvinians, both ethnic groups with close ties to the Mongols of the Mongolian Republic and Inner Mongolia in China. The situation in the Buryat Republic and two additional autonomous districts in the Baikal area with a dense Buryat population is more or less under Moscow's control. At any rate, nationalist demands by the latter two districts do not normally exceed demands for unification with their kinsmen in the Buryat Republic in order to constitute a common "subnational" state-entity within Russia. The situation in Tuva may become less manageable. This old Russian protectorate (since 1912) was under Chinese administration from 1917 to 1921 when a semi-independent Tuvinian People's Republic was formed under Soviet Russia's factual protection. In 1944 it was annexed by the USSR "at the request of the Tuvinian people," who from the mid-1920s had actually favored union with Mongolia, not Russia. The Tuvinians now feel wronged by the environmental disasters that have resulted from the exploitation of their natural resources and the heavy losses that agriculture has suffered from the construction of the giant Sayano-Shushenskaya hydroelectric plant and its reservoir, which caused soil erosion, changes in climate, reductions of pasture and a worsened epidemiological situation due to

the extraordinary increase of mosquitoes in the region. Therefore, it is not surprising that the rise of nationalistic feelings in Tuva have taken an anti-Russian stance and have fostered pro-Mongolian sentiments.

The Mongolian response is obviously a key point in all the cases of national secession in East Siberia. So far the Mongolian authorities have demonstrated a sense of responsibility and self-restraint. The problem, however, may result from developments initiated by the Tuvinians that might put both Mongolia and Russia in a very delicate situation. The point is not to reengage Mongolia into the Russian orbit but to preserve the high level of mutual loyalty and the clear vision of real and potential common interests.

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The reduced global threat initiated regional shifts that challenge the national aspirations of Northeast Asia. The emerging regional relationships will be defined not by post-World War II premises and perceptions that are no longer valid, but on democratic values, economic power, military stability and collaboration. Economic revitalization and the search for a "positive" strategic role in the region are the cornerstones of Russian policy in the Pacific. Russia has retreated, but it remains a Pacific nation whose principal objective is to be engaged constructively in the context of the U.S.-based regional system. Russia is strong enough militarily to defend its national interests. But these interests would be better protected if in addition to its missiles, Russia reached a political understanding with the United States, shared responsibilities, and undertook cooperative initiatives for the sake of peace and stability in the Pacific.

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